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The Montespan

by

Romain Rolland

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The Montespan

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[DRAMA IN THREE ACTS]

by

ROMAIN ROLLAND

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

by

HELENA VAN BRUGH DE KAY

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

I want to thank Miss Lucile Watson for her constructive criticism of this translation, and the late Mr. André Tridon and my sister, Miss Sylvia de Kay, for helpful suggestions.

INTRODUCTION À "LA MONTESPAN" POUR LES LECTEURS AMERICAINS.

Je viens de relire cette œuvre, écrite il y a plus de vingt années. J'y ai retrouvé l'atmosphère lourde et charnelle de la cour de Louis XIV, telle que je la respirais alors dans les Mémoires secrets du temps et les archives du fameux procès: "l'Affaire des Poisons," où se révélèrent les sauvages passions de cette société compassée. Car, à l'exception des libertés que j'ai prises avec l'état-civil de mes personnages et dont je fais l'aveu dans mon "*Avertissement*," tout dans cette pièce est exact: la couleur morale, les sentiments, la langue souvent presque textuellement empruntée aux récits des "Conquêtes du grand Alcandre." [1]

Et ceci m'a amené à des réflexions, dont je veux faire part à mes lecteurs américains:

Il est d'usage courant dans le language des civilisés de distinguer, au milieu du fleuve aux mille bras de l'histoire humaine, quelques îlots qui émergent, couronnés de gloire et de lumière,

[1] "*Le grand Alcandre*" est le nom sous lequel était désigné Louis XIV dans les mémoires secrets du temps.

et qui passent pour les cimes de la civilisation. On les nomme les grands Siècles; et l'on dit: "Le siècle d'Auguste, le siècle de Léon X, le siècle de Louis XIV,"—(bien qu'en réalité, le règne de ces souverains n'occupe qu'une partie des périodes sur lesquelles s'étend leur rayonnement).—Ce sont les âges dits "*classiques.*" Il semble qu'à ces moments, l'humanité ait atteint sa suprême harmonie, l'équilibre parfait des forces de l'esprit et du cœur, la maîtrise de la raison et la perfection du goût.

Mais l'homme est né courtisan du succès; il prête à la victoire toutes les vertus. Les grands triomphateurs—rois, papes, ou empereurs,—ont beau depuis longtemps être rentrés dans la poussière la posterité continue de les aduler. Et, comme de leur vivant, la consigne est observée de ne voir de ces âges que l'ordre et la majesté du splendide décor.

Mais le décor a des trous, regardons au travers! Que sont-ils, au vrai, ces âges?—Des siècles de proie, une meute d'instincts fauves, toujours près d'echapper au poing du grand-veneur.

Auguste édifie son "siècle" sur un sol rouge du sang des infâmes Proscriptions; c'est pour les nouveaux-riches engraissés de l'or de leur victimes,

des dépouilles de la Rome de Brutus et de Cicéron, que Virgile chante ses Eglogues, qu'Horace entonne son "*Carmen Seculare*"; et nous savons les scandales que recouvre et qu'étouffe, dans la propre famille du maître, la pourpre impériale.

L'interlude somptueux du pape épicurien aux belles et grasses mains, Léon le dilettante, se joue entre les orgies sanglantes des Borgia, les coups d'épée de Jules II et le sac de Rome atrocement dévastée.

Le regne de Louis XIV, à grand peine échappé au chaos de la Fronde, qui renouvela les misères et les débordements de la Ligue—(le mot d'ordre de l'histoire officielle fut de n'en laisser voir que le coté romanesque)—fut pendant cinquinte ans un "*refoulement*" constant (au sens Freudian du mot) d'une sauvagerie latente, à deux doigts d'exploser. Sous une extrême contrainte, une extrême brutalité. A tout moment, celle-ci se trahit par soudaines éruptions. La main du Roi-Soleil en vain renfonce les monstres. Ils sont là. L'Affaire des Poisons, qui a inspiré ce drame, montra à l'orgueilleux monarque qu'à l'heure triomphale où ses armées lui conquéraient en pleine paix l'Europe, il n'était même pas maître de ce qui l'entourait.

Non, ils ne furent jamais la fleur de la civilisation, les siècles dits "*classiques*"! Cette fleur, bien plutôt, exhala sa douceur de vivre dans les âges plus fins, plus amollis, qui suivirent,—tel le XVIIIe siècle français. . . . Et après, vient le coup de faux de la Révolution: la fleur tombe. . . . Leur grandeur est ailleurs: dans les forces maîtrisées, dans un excès de passions que tient en respect un excès de raison, dans le combat tragique qui se livre en secret entre la violence des instincts et celle de la volonté.

C'est pourquoi nous voyons une époque comme la nôtre, qui sent le sol trembler et l'écorce de l'âme humaine, convulsée, qui se fend sous la poussée des guerres et des révolutions, tourner son regard anxieux vers l'idéal "*classique*,"—l'âge de l'ordre à tout prix, l'âge des maîtres impérieux.

Eternels flux et reflux de l'histoire humaine! Contemplons-les d'un regard apaisé. Tout n'a qu'un temps. Après les âges de liberté, les âges d'autorité. Après les âges d'autorité, les âges de liberté. J'admire celle-là; mais à la Liberté seule, malgré ses risques, je réserve mon amour.

Romain Rolland.

juillet 1923.

INTRODUCTION TO "THE MONTESPAN" FOR AMERICAN READERS

I have just reread this work, written more than twenty years ago.

Once again I inhale the thick carnal atmosphere of the court of Louis XIV, just as I then breathed it in the secret memoirs of the times and the archives of the famous case, "The Poison Affair," where the savage passions of this affectedly formal society are revealed. For, except for the liberties I have taken with the social status of my characters and to which I refer in the "Notice," [at the end of this volume] everything in this play is veracious: the moral color, the emotions, the language itself often borrowed verbatim from accounts of "Conquests of the Great Alcandre." [1]

And this has led me to make some reflections which I should like to share with my American readers.

It is customary among civilized people to distinguish in the thousand-branched river of human history a few islets which emerge, crowned

[1] Name by which Louis XIV was designated in the secret memoirs of the times.

with light and glory, and which pass for the heights of civilization. We call them the great eras; and we say the era of Augustus, the era of Leo X, the era of Louis XIV (although in reality the reigns of these sovereigns occupy but a part of the periods over which their radiation extends). They are the ages called "classic." It would seem that at those times humanity had attained its supreme harmony, perfect balance of the forces of head and heart, mastery of reason, perfection in taste.

But man is a born courtier of success; he lends every virtue to victory. The great conquerors—kings, popes or emperors—may well have long ago been gathered into dust, posterity continues to adulate them. And, as in their life-time, the command is obeyed to discern in these epochs only the system and majesty of their splendid pageant.

But there are holes in this pageantry. Let us look through them. What are they in truth, these times? Epochs of prey, a pack of hounds with blind instincts, always straining to escape from the huntsman's leash.

Augustus builds his "age" upon ground red with the blood of the infamous Proscriptions; it is for the nouveaux-riches, glutted with the gold

of their victims, spoils of the Rome of Brutus and Cicero, that Virgil sings his Eclogues, that Horace intones his "Carmen Seculare"; and we know the scandals in the master's own family which only imperial purple stifles and conceals.

The sumptuous interlude of the epicurean pope, with fat, beautiful hands, Leo the dilettante, is played between bloody orgies of the Borgias, sword thrusts of Julius II and the atrociously devastating sack of Rome.

The reign of Louis XIV, narrowly escaping the chaos of the Fronde, which in turn renewed the miseries and uprisings of the League (the pass-word of official history was to allow only the romantic side to be seen), constituted during fifty years a constant "repression" (in the Freudian sense) of a latent savagery on the point of exploding. Beneath an extreme restraint, extreme brutality, the latter betraying itself frequently through sudden erruptions. In vain does the hand of "le Roi-Soleil" drive back the monsters. They remain. The "Poison Affair," which has inspired this drama, showed the proud monarch that at the hour triumphant when his armies were conquering a peaceful Europe he could not even master his own surroundings.

No, they were never the flower of civilizatio
the so-called "classic times"! This flower rathe
exhaled its sweetness in the finer, mellower ge
erations that followed, such as the French XVI
century. . . . And then comes the scythe thru
of the Revolution: the flower falls. . . . The
greatness lies elsewhere: in the mastery of force
in an excess of passions which an excess of reas
holds in leash, in the tragic combat secretly ta
ing place between the violence of the instinc
and that of the will.

This is why we see an epoch like our own—
which feels the ground tremble beneath it an
the shell of the human soul, convulsed, crack u
der the pressure of wars and revolutions,—tu
its anxious eyes toward the "classic" ideal, th
time of order at any price, the time of imperio
masters.

Eternal flux and reflux of human history. L
us contemplate it peacefully. Everything has i
day. After eras of liberty those of authorit
After eras of authority those of liberty. I ad
mire the former, but to Liberty alone in spite o
her risks I give my love

ROMAIN ROLLAND.

July 1923.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Frances Athenaïs, Marquise de Montespan (*aged 39 or 40*).

Marie-Aube de Blois, her daughter (*aged 16*).

Angélique de Fontanges (*aged 18*).

The Queen (*aged 45*).

La Voisin, old female attendant on Madame de Montespan.

The King, Louis XIV. (*aged 50*).

Louvois (*aged 40*).

Gabriel Nicolas de la Reynie, Lieutenant-General of Police (*aged 55*).

Three Courtiers.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Court.

PLACE

Versailles.

TIME

About 1680.

THE MONTESPAN

ACT I

Scene I

In the palace at Versailles. Madame de Montespan's *apartment.* Madame de Montespan *is lying in a great bed of state in the middle of the room. At the foot of the bed* Marie-Aube, *her daughter, and* Mademoiselle de Fontanges *hold a newly-born infant enveloped in swaddling clothes and laces. Near the head of the bed is seated* La Voisin, *a little to one side, upon the step of the platform which supports the bed. The room is bordered with a row of courtiers who file past, kissing the hand of the* Marquise. *The windows are open. One hears outside the acclamations of the crowd and the violins and oboes playing dance airs.*

Before the Curtain rises, there is a murmur of voices both on and off the stage. When the Curtain is well up, Madame *speaks:*

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Show the child to the people!

[MARIE-AUBE, *who holds the child, starts to give it to* MADEMOISELLE DE FONTANGES.]

You, my daughter.

MARIE-AUBE

[*Hesitatingly*] Madam . . .

MME. DE MONTESPAN

I wish it.

[MARIE-AUBE *advances toward the balcony with the child in her arms.* ANGÉLIQUE DE FONTANGES *accompanies her.*]

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

Look, Marie-Aube. What a wonderful spectacle! This great people acclaiming your brother, this child! How blest you are! . . . What's the matter?

MARIE-AUBE

[*About to lean out of the window, throws herself backward*]

These cries are horrible to me. Fontanges, take the child. Don't let my mother know.

[Mademoiselle de Fontanges *takes the child from her arms and shows it to the crowd, whose cries redouble.*]

La Voisin

[*Drawing near the* Marquise's *pillow*]
How loud they are shouting, Madam!

Mme. de Montespan

Not loud enough! When the Dauphin was born they made a fire in the castle-court with the planks of the lower rooms and the sedan chairs. They must cry louder still! Voisin, open my purse.—Take some money. Throw it to them!

[La Voisin *obeys, and throws the money out of the balcony. The people shout for joy.*]

First Courtier

[*In a low voice*] All this noise because the King's mare has borne another bastard.

Second Courtier

With what arrogance the strumpet triumphs!

Third Courtier

Sixteen years have not shaken her empire over Louis the Fourteenth.

SECOND COURTIER

Sixteen years? Is it as long as that?

THIRD COURTIER

The dates are written there; in the first child and the last.

[*He points to* MARIE-AUBE *and the infant, who is carried out of the room.* MARIE-AUBE *and* MADEMOISELLE DE FONTANGES *leave with it.*]

FIRST COURTIER

She has already been very near falling from power. But when one imagines she's about to lose her stirrups, a peculiar luck brings back her fortune and puts her in the saddle again.

SECOND COURTIER

She must have some magical powers with which ordinary means are unable to cope. All this isn't natural.

FIRST COURTIER

No other magic but her lust! Courtesans' recipes, those are her sorceries.

SECOND COURTIER

No, no, there is some mystery. If one could question some of the witches skulking around her, one would learn about lots of things.

FIRST COURTIER

Pooh! The formula of some poisons and love-potions!

SECOND COURTIER

Laugh away, Mr. Know-it-all. Don't you believe in the Devil?

FIRST COURTIER

Every woman is the Devil. Come, we must do her reverence.

[*They go to kiss the hand of the* MARQUISE. *Most of the courtiers leave, a few at a time.*]

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Who receives their homage with haughty indifference, her eyes care-worn and hard*]

Where is the Queen? Why hasn't she come yet?

[*There is a movement among the courtiers near the entrance door.*]

A Gentleman

Madam, Her Majesty is here.

[Scene II: *The* Queen *enters. She is a small, fat woman, with hurried and uncertain movements.*]

The Queen

Bless me, Madam, how glad I am to see you out of danger! They told me yesterday evening that you were dying. Last night I conjured up all sorts of spectres! I dreamed of black curtains, of wax candles, of coffins.

Mme. de Montespan

I thank Your Majesty for your solicitude. I hope this nonsense did not trouble your sleep.

The Queen

Alas! Don't worry. All the cares in the world have never prevented me from sleeping. I don't know what to make of it! There are nights when I am sorrowful enough to croak; my pillow is saturated with tears; and yet I have to sleep.—Come now, let me look at your face. Wow! How awful it looks! You are pale as death, my love. Give me your hand. . . . Why you're

feverish. How do you feel? But you are not at all well! But really you are very ill indeed!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Your Majesty is taking too much interest in my health. I am very much better.

THE QUEEN

No, no, you are mistaken. I will say a novena for you to Saint Margaret.—My God, don't die, my dear girl, I beg of you! If you left us, how I should miss you!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Ironically*] I didn't realize that I was so necessary to your service.

THE QUEEN

Yes indeed!—I am a creature of habit. I need to have the same people always about me. New faces trouble me. I believe I would rather tolerate some one I don't like than make a change of faces.

[*After a little silence*]

All the more, isn't it so, when one is attached to people, as I am to you?—Whew! How they bellow! Doesn't all that exhaust you?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

No, Madam. There is no sweeter music to high-born souls than the chants of glory.

THE QUEEN

They never made so much noise when I gave birth to the Dauphin. It's true we didn't need it.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Why?

THE QUEEN

Monseigneur must rule these people some day, so it matters little whether he is loved by them or not.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Your Majesty knows better than any one, however, that one reigns by love as much as by birth.

THE QUEEN

Yes, in this country, the first pretty face that entices, a coquette, a dressed up puss, is preferred to true virtue. When I first came to France from Austria, this mental aberration used to sadden me, I confess. Since—I am resigned to it: one has to adapt oneself to the customs of a country, however unreasonable they may be.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

No doubt: but doesn't true virtue find its recompense in itself?

THE QUEEN

Yes: it's a great consolation; but sometimes one would rather give up one's virtue if one could change the shape of one's nose.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Well! What's that you say?

THE QUEEN

Hush, hush, what have I said? I've exaggerated! If Father Annat heard me, I would be well scolded! Don't repeat it to him, my love. Should women of our age still care about pleasing?—We can well be virtuous, reasonable, and know as a certainty that there is nothing preferable to a chaste life—still the demon skulks at our ear and whispers his disgusting temptations. Just now particularly, they say he has spread his net around us, he pursues us incessantly. What a frightful thing! Ah, my love, we must defend ourselves well!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

What do you mean?

THE QUEEN

Don't you know what's happening? Hasn't the King said anything to you about it? Wait, I must come nearer. It seems they don't want any one to know it. The police are on the trail! We mustn't obstruct them.

[*The courtiers have all left. The* QUEEN *is alone with* MADAME DE MONTESPAN, *and* LA VOISIN, *hidden behind the bed.*]

My love, the Devil is at court. We are surrounded by sorcerers and magicians. They spy upon us, then try to snap up our souls. Nothing is able to cope with this brood; they are chased out the door and return by the window; one burns them up, they are reborn. Monsieur de la Reynie has found an immense association of these demons, in which a mass of great lords have allowed themselves to be enmeshed. . . . Are you cold?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Shudders imperceptibly*] No, Madam, go on.

THE QUEEN

The court is infected. Some have sold their souls to the Devil for money, others for honors, others, —and this is the most ignoble of all,—others for

love!—Monsieur the Marshall of Luxembourg, such a good man! . . . He was taken to the Bastille just now, the constables are with him. It seems that he asked the Devil to carry off his wife! What an abomination!—Good Heavens! when I think that I allowed him to caress my little dog, Rocroy, yesterday!—And Madame de Soissons! As for her, I am delighted. An abandoned creature who eats meat on Friday and sleeps with her lackeys! She has poisoned half a dozen of her lovers. She has just fled from Paris in her coach. But they've taken her sister, Madame de Bouillon! It was she who poisoned her husband in order to marry Monsieur de Vendôme. And Madame de Polignac, and Madame de Gramont, and Madame d'Angoulème! Ah! The jades! I hope they'll not coddle them this time, but will make an example of them so that good women will have their revenge. Isn't it terrible? Terror is everywhere. One doesn't dare touch anything: everything has the taste of poison. This morning while crossing the Galerie des Batailles, suddenly an odor of sulphur seized me by the throat; I had only the time to make a few signs of the cross: I am certain that *He* had just passed there.—What do you think of that,

my love? As for me, I am not so much astonished at the villainy of men as at their frightful courage in losing themselves to perdition in order to satisfy their filthy instincts. Can one conceive of such a thing, as that beings endowed with reason should voluntarily hand themselves over to the Enemy of the human race, and for eternity?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Why not? The fact is they want what they want, and in order to execute it all means are good.

THE QUEEN

Even Hell?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

What does Hell amount to, compared with Love or Hate?

THE QUEEN

But my dear, one loves or hates only for a few weeks. One is *burned* for centuries.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Passionately*] What does that matter, if for a day, an hour, a second, one has gained the victory! Whose soul is so cowardly that he would

not commit one crime, were that alone to separate him from his desired end? Such a soul as that does not love, does not live. Such a soul is nothing, it has never existed; I like my own hell better than a bovine paradise, ever rechewing its dirty cud!

THE QUEEN

Dear me! Dear me! Don't get so excited! How agitated you are! One would say you approved of these demon-worshippers!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

I don't approve of them, Madam. I understand and pity them. It is hypocritical to call oneself a Christian, and then throw stones at those who have sinned, without trying to realize what suffering they have gone through in order to make up their minds to the atrocious heroism of sin.

THE QUEEN

I said nothing, my dear, I accused no one. I never dreamed you would take it so to heart! Don't agitate yourself. Your milk will turn. Get back under the sheets. You're in a cold sweat. There, let us speak of something else.—And what did you do with my beautiful necklace?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

What necklace?

THE QUEEN

Why that diamond necklace, with a miniature representing Lucretia. . . .

MME. DE MONTESPAN

I don't know what you mean.

THE QUEEN

But my dear, the King asked me for it last night at St. Cloud, at Madame's; and I gave it to him with great delight; for I never doubted that it was you for whom he intended it. You mean to say he didn't present it to you? His expression was so gallant, so impassioned, when he asked me for it that we were all taken in! Then he must have given it to someone else. It's unbelievable!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

He will very likely bring it to me presently.

THE QUEEN

No, of that much I'm quite sure; because I asked him this morning if the present had pleased, and

he said yes. That means he has disposed of it. Well! That's pleasant! But don't be anxious, my child. I'll give you another.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

I don't want it.

THE QUEEN

Yes, yes, I insist, you have the right to it. It will be richer even than the first one. I will send it to you at once. The King has defrauded you!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

No, no, I tell you, I don't want it. I don't want it.

THE QUEEN

How irritable you are! Everything hurts you to-day. You are ill. I won't send it, my daughter. I don't want to force you.—But at least, tell me that this bit of gossip hasn't affected you? You know the King: those are his little ways. He must always be burning for some petticoat. As for me, I can laugh heartily at it. He cannot make up his mind to grow old. But I wonder who his latest flame can be?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

I am tired. I beg you to excuse me.

THE QUEEN

Yes, yes, I know, you need sleep. I'm going . . . Dear me, how badly you look! One really wouldn't recognize you. Take good care of yourself, my daughter. Do it for my sake. At our age one must be careful. Keep up your courage, eat well, sleep well, and don't think about anything.

[MADAME DE MONTESPAN, *mute and quivering, bows to the* QUEEN, *who exits.* MME. DE MONTESPAN *follows her with her eyes as she goes, grinding her teeth, her fingers clutching the sheets.*]

[SCENE III: MADAME DE MONTESPAN, LA VOISIN.]

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Sits up in bed and calls*] Voisin!

LA VOISIN

[*Emerging from the corner of the bed in whose shadow she has been hiding*]

My daughter?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Did you hear? He's been deceiving me! He loves another. Some one has taken my place! He gives generously to others of what is mine.—That's why he hasn't been here to-day, then! He is slipping away from me. . . . It can't be so, it isn't true! It's an invention of that liar—that evil-doing idiot has imagined this tale, this necklace affair in order to torture me!

LA VOISIN

She told you the truth. You have a rival.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Dunce! You knew it then, and you said nothing!

LA VOISIN

One more insult, and I leave you.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Wait! Ah, how you abuse the fact that I need you!—Who is this woman? Why did you tell me nothing?

LA VOISIN

I can give people the means to foresee their own destiny and mould it; I haven't the right to mould it for them.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Eh! What have you given me? I have believed in you, I have submitted myself to you, drunk your philters, recited your prayers, worn your amulets. Every day in order to obey you, I walk on the edge of eternal death. And what for? For this!

LA VOISIN

What are you complaining of? Due to me, you have held a king's heart fast for fifteen years.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Yes. But at the price of what struggles! Not an hour of rest. Every day a new fight. And no sooner do my eyes, overpowered with sleep, close in spite of me, than this uncertain heart you speak of, steals away and eludes me. What exhaustion! Must I be grateful for such hourly conquests, where everything has continually to recommence?

LA VOISIN

You have the only success you deserve. The means you use can't give you anything but transient victories. Others, stronger than you, must achieve the final triumph. You have recoiled!

You alone are the cause of what you reproach me with.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

What more could I do?

LA VOISIN

You know.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Be quiet!

LA VOISIN

You know very well what I'm speaking of. It is such a little thing after all: a few ceremonies, a mass. . . .

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Yes, a mass, the Black Mass. . . . Be quiet! I forbade you to mention it again.

LA VOISIN

The King's grandfather said that Paris was well worth a mass.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

But what a Mass!

LA VOISIN

Well, you have consented to use the Master; but you take away with one hand what you give with

the other. Don't be astonished if He does the same. To be sure of Him, He must be sure of you.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Do I refuse him anything of myself? My soul is his; but he must not ask me to debase myself to these foul practices!

LA VOISIN

What do they amount to? A few gestures. Not a word. Shut your eyes and give over your body.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Eyes fixed*] Nude, lying on the altar, head and limbs hanging down—the eyes and hands of a vicious priest upon me,—the Lord's cross and the sacred chalice on my sacrilegious body,—the chalice, red with the blood of an innocent child! . . . No, no! Be gone!

LA VOISIN

What is that, compared with what you want? Isn't the power that only demands the blood of an innocent child, obtained at a very low cost?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

I feel sick. I will not, I cannot humiliate myself.

La Voisin

[*Bitterly*] You, who think you have run the gamut of voluptuous sensations,—you are ignorant of the most powerful one of all, that of degrading oneself. The human herd is parked between two narrow limits: that of good and that of evil. It is forbidden to go either higher or lower. Only a small number dare cross the barriers; and the glory is greater in crossing that of evil because it is more forbidden. To break one's chains, to wrest oneself out of the iron collar of human morality, to slap one's conscience in the face, to vilify oneself. It is a bitter joy for those who are great and dominate the world. It is nothing to scorn others: one must also scorn oneself. What a delightful sensation to trample under foot the works of God, to soil His image, to drag oneself down, down still further! Then one becomes like the Other, the One who laughs amid sorrow and is puffed up in abjection, the Master who holds in his hands all the power of the world, not in order to use it, but to destroy it!

Mme. de Montespan

Illness has broken my heart; it is too feeble to bear your savage ardors. Ah! Voisin! I can't.

Think that one instant of imprudence would suffice to lose me forever!

LA VOISIN

One instant also suffices, if you do not act, to ruin your power. Dare!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Drily*] I don't wish to.

[LA VOISIN *pretends to go.* MME. DE MONTESPAN, *beseeching*]

Don't be angry, Voisin, don't abandon me! I am worn out, exhausted, consumed with fever. I can't think. Spare me! Later! I must sleep now. I want to get well, I want to get well. . . .

[LA VOISIN *starts to go.* MME. DE MONTESPAN *calls her back*]

Wait. Let us say the prayer together.

[LA VOISIN *returns, kneels down by the bed.* MME. DE MONTESPAN, *seated on the bed, says the prayer with restrained exaltation*]

"I ask the love of the King: that it shall continue with me. That no other woman shall enter his bed. That my rivals shall die. That the Queen's race shall become extinct: that my children shall take the places of hers in their honors

and the throne. That I shall be all-powerful at the King's counsels: that my will shall be his; that my creatures shall be his; and that my glory more than redoubling the past, the Queen being repudiated, I can espouse the King.*

[*Silence.*]

[La Voisin *remains kneeling another moment, while* Mme. de Montespan, *mute, seems to be obstinately attached to her ideas.* La Voisin *gets up, arranges the pillows for* Mme. de Montespan *who gets back into bed; she then draws the curtains and leaves.* —Madame de Montespan, *immobile, eyes closed, seems to sleep.*]

[Scene IV: Marie-Aube *and* Angélique de Fontanges *half open the door and look in.*

Mlle. de Fontanges

Madam is sleeping.

[*They enter on tiptoe and go to sit at the bottom of the bed, on the high step of the platform, their backs turned to* Madame de Montespan. *They talk in low tones and work on some embroidery*]

*Note: This prayer is authentic and may be found in the French archives.

How nervous she was to-day! She seemed to be suffering.

MARIE-AUBE

My mother worries all the time. I have never seen her happy.

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

Never happy! A day like this! . . . Ah! . . .

[*Sighs, looking out of the window.*]

MARIE-AUBE

You're sighing. What are you dreaming of?

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

Ah, Marie! This triumphant day, this happy crowd, these glorious acclamations, all Versailles come to give homage, and the Queen herself! . . . How fortunate Madam is! How happy you should be too!

MARIE-AUBE

I would willingly give this joy to you. Or rather . . . God keep me from making such a wish! I love you too much to wish you to be in my place.

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

How queerly you said that! What's the matter?

MARIE-AUBE

Oh, nothing.

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

You have tears in your eyes.

MARIE-AUBE

It's nothing; it's gone, you see.

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

You have some trouble, I have noticed it for some time. And just now again on the balcony, you were really quite upset. Have you any secrets from me? You must tell me everything. We promised to hide nothing from each other. . . . Oh, Marie, don't you love me?

MARIE-AUBE

You'll make me cry again. You see, I'm absurd. I do all I can to stop myself. . . .

[*She cries.*]

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

Good Heavens! What anguish! What's the matter? Have you a lover?

MARIE-AUBE

[*Smiling through her tears*] No.

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

But then what *is* it, darling?

MARIE-AUBE

Ah, Fontanges, to live in this ignominy!

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

What do you say?

MARIE-AUBE

To feel this corruption around me, this odor of sin, the breath of these rotten souls! How loathsome! There are nights when I can't breathe; I sit up in bed without daring to lay my head on the pillow. I don't dare even touch it with my hand: the walls, the sheets, everything, seems to be greasy with vice. This odor of death suffocates me. I can't live.

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

But, my darling, you are ill; how can you think such things?

MARIE-AUBE

Don't oblige me to tell you what you know as well as I do. Doesn't my shame make you blush? Don't you feel around me the horror of adultery?

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

Marie!

MARIE-AUBE

Ah! good God!

[*She turns around and looks at* MADAME DE MONTESPAN, *who is motionless, her eyes closed*]

She is sleeping.

[*Lower*]

She mustn't hear! I would die of grief if she should suspect what is in my heart!—Fontanges, how did she dare? She was married, she had children; and the King too. Nothing stopped them from committing this sin, from living in this sin. At their age, Fontanges! And old age is coming on and makes the crime more awful from day to day. All these people who know it, who see it, who flatter us and scorn us! This terrible common people, exulting in the birth of my brother, a little unfortunate being, like me a child of sin, like me a bastard! Oh! Fontanges! They called me that just now, I heard it, there, Monsieur de Gesvres. . . .

[*She weeps*]

He is right. No matter what I do, this flesh, this soul, are the work of sin, the fruit of two

adulteries. My father an adulterer, my mother an adulteress. Isn't it horrible? Who will wash me of this shame?

[MME. DE MONTESPAN *sighs.*]

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

[*Putting her hand on* MARIE-AUBE'S *lips*] Hush, hush please!

MARIE-AUBE

[*Looking at* MME. DE MONTESPAN] She sighed. She is dreaming. . . . Poor Mother! How I would love to blot out her crime! How can she judge herself? Everything conspires to bewilder her. Not one person about her who dares to think right. No advice. I tried to tell my anguish to my confessor, but he has forbidden me to speak. I can't live here. If I could only run away!

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

Do you want to become another Hermit—to look for the Thebais?

MARIE-AUBE

I have often thought of it. To live in a desert, far from everything, with God! I have begged

my director to favor my wish! I asked my mother to let me enter religion. They sternly refused me.

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

They were right to prevent you from bringing about your own unhappiness.

MARIE-AUBE

What happiness is there in staying here? Don't I see clearly all that they suffer? What tears devour my mother? What torments! Never an instant of joy!

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

You are not worthy of your happiness.—To be what you are! Why it's a marvellous thing! If I were only in your place!

MARIE-AUBE

Do you dare to envy me?

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

With all my heart!

MARIE-AUBE

In spite . . .

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

Bah! God isn't so severe! To love one another, that's no great matter. A love-affair is quite innocent. Whom do a few caresses harm? Must one bother God for that?—And then of what use would the confessors be, if one had nothing to tell them? When one is young, it is good to sin!

MARIE-AUBE

You're crazy!

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

To reign over the hearts of men, to keep the eyes of the world fixed on one's glory, to feel oneself enveloped by desires, to dispose of favors, to see a king on his knees! How delicious all that is! —Dear King! How sweet it is to love him and be loved by him! How good he is! What tenderness and majesty he has!

[*She plays with her necklace*]

MARIE-AUBE

Stop, Fontanges, I beg of you.

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

Why? Can't I say that your father is lovable?

MARIE-AUBE

He is, I feel it too; but I don't know why, I feel embarrassed to hear you say so.

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

[*Putting her arms around* MARIE-AUBE'S *neck*]

Dear Aube, so innocent! Dear little bastard! Don't you realize that I love you all the more for being one?

MARIE-AUBE

[*Disengaging herself from her embrace*]

Fontanges, I forbid you! . . . If you continue I'll get angry.—What are you playing with? What is that necklace? I've never seen it on you before.—Show it to me. A Lucrece. But it belongs to the Queen!

[MME. DE MONTESPAN *who has opened her eyes a few minutes before, and has lifted herself up little by little in the bed, following the young girls' conversation with devouring attention, has a nervous start at* MARIE-AUBE'S *last word.*]

Where did you get it, Fontanges?

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

It's a secret.

MARIE-AUBE

Tell me, tell me, who gave it to you?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Violently*] It's the King!

[*The two young girls start.* FONTANGES *falls on her knees and hides her face.* MARIE-AUBE *rises, looks at her with anguish, and gives a cry of sorrow.*]

[MME. DE MONTESPAN *to* MARIE-AUBE, *violently*]

Go!

[MARIE-AUBE *goes without a word, pale and frozen.*]

[SCENE V: MADAME DE MONTESPAN, ANGÉLIQUE DE FONTANGES]

MME. DE MONTESPAN

You, come here!

[MLLE. DE FONTANGES *throws herself down at the foot of the bed and remains there, her face hidden in the sheets.*]

Is it the King?

[MLLE. DE FONTANGES *is silent, immobile and trembling.*]

Look at me!

[*She takes her violently by the hair, and forces her to lift her head.*]

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

Madam, you're hurting me. . . .

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Answer!

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

It is.

[MME. DE MONTESPAN *snarls, and angrily twists the mass of hair she holds in her hand.*]

Madam, I shall scream!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Loosens her grip, throws herself back on the pillow, sighs, then, sitting up again*]

When did he give it to you? Where? How?

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

[*Hesitating*] Madam. . . .

MME. DE MONTESPAN

It was yesterday, at St. Cloud, at Madame's.

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

How do you know?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

He told me so.

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

He told you? The King? When?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

This morning.

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

It isn't true. He doesn't come here without first seeing me!

[MME. DE MONTESPAN *makes a threatening movement.* MLLE. DE FONTANGES *draws back fearfully.*]

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Sneeringly*] Then, he loves you?

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

[*Lowering her head, hardly speaking, but with overwhelming pride*]

Yes.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Since when?

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

Two months ago.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Since I have been ill. The coward!—How did you get to know him?

[MLLE. DE FONTANGES *shakes her head.*]

You won't say?—What's that to me? He doesn't love you. He's been amusing himself with you. You have lightened his boredom for an instant.

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

He doesn't love me? Ah! Dear God! I believe his sweet words, his passionate caresses. . . . He doesn't love me? Why haven't you seen him here, Madam, at my knees,—this great King, bathing my hands with his wonderful tears!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*With a forced laugh*] The ninny! Wouldn't

one say she was about to swoon! What an ideal love-affair! A disgusting and infirm old man. What a touching spectacle, this fifty-year-old lover, weeping senile tears at the feet of a worthless little trifle! . . . What? You mean to say he really went down on his knees? How was he able to get up again? Did he call his valets?

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

Ah! How easy it is to see that you don't love him, that you never have loved him! I despise you, I despise you!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

By what shameful means did you awaken his senses?

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

At any rate I didn't make up to him as you did, in broad daylight, in a gallery open to passers-by!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Seizing the necklace roughly*]

Give it to me!

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

[*Trying to disengage herself*]

No!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

I want it.

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

[*Struggling*] You shan't have it! You shan't have it!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Will you let go? I will break your hands!

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

You're lacerating me! You're tearing my hair out. . . . Ah! What cruelty!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Tears off the necklace*]
I have it!

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

Give it back to me!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Get away!

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

Thief! I'll let everyone know. You've stolen from me. It's my possession!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Really! There it is, your possession!

[*She breaks the necklace with her hands, and grinds the medallion beneath a massive object, a candelabra standing on the table near her.*]

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

Ah!

[*With concentration*]

How glorious that is! How proud you must be of your work! Malevolent and cowardly beast! . . . But all that you do only serves to show all the more clearly your impotence. The King loves you no longer. He told me so.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Straightening up in a menacing manner*]

Be quiet!

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

I disdain you. We laughed at you together. He loves me. I am young. As for you, you're a sick person, an old woman!

[MME. DE MONTESPAN *throws back her sheets violently, jumps out of bed, and seizes a knife on the table.*]

Ah! What are you doing! Pardon! Help!

[*She gives a jump backwards and rushes towards the end of the room. The door opens. People appear, and look curiously in.* MME. DE MONTESPAN, *trembling with cold and anger, looks at* MLLE. DE FONTANGES *with scorn, throws the knife on the floor, and gets back into bed.*]

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*With cold and violent anger*]

Street-walker! Strumpet! Off with you! I turn you out!

[*To the people listening at the door*]

Who called you?

[*They retire.*]

A GENTLEMAN

Madam, the King.

[MLLE. DE FONTANGES *runs out weeping, her hair in disorder.* MME. DE MONTESPAN *seizes a mirror and hastily readjusts herself.*]

[SCENE VI: *The* KING *enters. His tone and mien are courteous and gay, with a certain affectation.*]

THE KING

Eh! What, Madam, still in bed? I no longer recognize the intrepid Marquise. We must have you up! We must have you up!

[*He kisses her hands.*]

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Gravely*] I almost died yesterday.

THE KING

[*Embarrassed*] It's over, it's over, let's talk no more of it.—You're looking wonderfully well.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Bitterly*] Thanks to the paint-box.

THE KING

Eh! Why tell me so? I don't want to know anything about it. Why do you tremble?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

I'm cold.

[*The* KING *covers her with the sheets.—During all this time, he has been looking about him.* MME. DE MONTESPAN *observes him*]

What are you looking for?

THE KING

Are you alone?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

I was expecting you.

THE KING

What, do they leave you alone? That can't be permitted. It is my wish that one of your daughters should always be with you.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

I have just sent them away. Does it frighten you to have one moment alone with me?

THE KING

What's that you say, Madam? I am delighted.
[*He fidgets in a bored way.*]

MME. DE MONTESPAN

I hoped to see you yesterday.

THE KING

No, you were ill. I wanted to wait until you had recovered, in order to see you always beautiful, as is your custom.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Is your affection so fragile that you feared to lose it in putting it to the test of illness?

THE KING

I don't like sadness. One must put it out of sight.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

But has it never occurred to you that in taking a little sadness from one's friend, one leaves him that much less to carry?

THE KING

Racine once told me a beautiful thing. The Gods of Olympus turned away from the death-beds of men. They wouldn't soil their eyes with the spectacle of death.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Sire, the Gods of Olympus were immortal, and we are not. What's the use of turning away our eyes, when death travels in our flesh, when each day its road widens in our wrinkles and pains? Instead of giving ourselves illusions, wouldn't it be more intelligent to look pityingly on the rust of age, and help each other tenderly to bear the horrors of growing old?

THE KING

[*Discontentedly*] One doesn't grow old by wanting it.—I have always remarked, Marquise, that you had a taste for morbid fancies. It doesn't please me. Let us change the subject.—It's true you seem to look badly. You have changed.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Anxiously*] It's nothing. A few sunny days will put me right.

THE KING

[*Drily*] I hope so. It's not right to be sick.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

I was wrong to speak to you of my troubles. It is I myself now, who beg you to speak of something else. What have you been doing to-day?

THE KING

[*Bored*] I drove out in the barouche after dinner, with Madame de Bourbon, the Princess of Conty, and their daughters. We went to kill boars in the woods. They killed more than twenty, most of them with darts.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

The air must have been sweet in the moist autumn woods.

THE KING

[*Yawning*] There are many new kinds of pheasants in the forest, and it has never been so peopled with deer and small game. You must see it soon. You must get up. It seems centuries since you've been seen about. The court doesn't know you any more. You don't do anything.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Sire, I bear Your Majesty's children.

THE KING

[*Bored*] You're not comfortable. These pillows are disarranged. I must call someone.

[*He rings.*]

MME. DE MONTESPAN

In former days you needed no one to pay me these attentions.

[*A servant appears.*]

THE KING

Ask Mademoiselle de Fontanges to come here.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Why she?

THE KING

And why not?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Very well.

[MADEMOISELLE DE FONTANGES *enters, still very much disturbed, her eyes red.*]

[SCENE VII: MME. DE MONTESPAN, MLLE. DE FONTANGES, *the* KING]

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*In a hard tone*] Arrange these pillows.

[*The* KING *tries hard to attract the attention of* MADEMOISELLE DE FONTANGES, *who avoids looking at him, her eyes obstinately lowered.*]

THE KING

What is the matter, Mademoiselle? Have you been crying?

[MADEMOISELLE DE FONTANGES *shakes her head without speaking.*]

Your eyes are red, you have been weeping.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

It has to do with her service, something between ourselves.

[*To* MADEMOISELLE DE FONTANGES, *drily*]

Have you finished? Go!

THE KING

[*Emotionally*] Wait, Mademoiselle—someone has hurt you. You have an enemy. I cannot bear it. Who has made you unhappy? Confide in your King, tell him all, as to your best friend.

[MLLE. DE FONTANGES *turns away and hides her face in her hands.*]

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Her best friend! Her best lover, you mean!

THE KING

Madam!

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

[*Throws herself weeping, at the feet of the* KING]

Ah, Sire, come to my aid! She hates me because she knows that I love you and that you love me. She insulted me before the whole court, just now,

calling me terrible names,—names—I wouldn't dare to repeat them! She struck me, she wanted to kill me; and your necklace, Sire, the necklace you gave me, she tore it off by force, she . . . Ah, look, look what she did with it!

[*She sobs.*]

THE KING

[*To* MME. DE MONTESPAN]

What, Madam, you dared! . . .

[*To* MLLE. DE FONTANGES]

Arise, Mademoiselle, in the name of heaven do not cry, you break my heart! Don't cry, my beautiful!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

How can you speak of audacity, you who come here to debauch my servants?

THE KING

I do my will.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Then it isn't only your action, but your will which is base.

THE KING

Do you forget who I am?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

No, you're an old man.

THE KING

Madam! . . .

MME. DE MONTESPAN

I thought you would at least have had sufficient decency to blush for these shameful weaknesses. But no! You parade your senile love for a corrupt little girl with a coarse figure, hideous teeth, no neck, flat arms, who is dirty, ugly, asinine, this . . .

THE KING

How dare you insult a person whom I honor? Can one push insolence any further than to despise what one's King esteems? By heaven! That is to be miserable indeed! Not a little gentleman who doesn't make his mistress respected by his friends and servants,—and a King cannot manage to achieve it? I protest, however, that whatever the means may be, I will succeed. Speak freely, Mademoiselle. What do you wish me to do to those who have outraged you? Be certain that I shall always be able to satisfy you.

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

[*Wiping her tears, her eyes gleaming with pride and defiance*]

Sire, love me! I ask nothing more.

THE KING

How generous you are!

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

Let this sick woman debase herself to such ignoble insults, if she wishes! I revenge myself upon her by forgetting her. Nothing could hurt her more. Come.

THE KING

I adore you.

[MADEMOISELLE DE FONTANGES *throws a triumphant glance at* MADAME DE MONTESPAN, *and goes out. The* KING *follows her.*]

MME. DE MONTESPAN

You're not going? . . . Wait a moment,—please! Don't leave me this way! I want to tell you. . . . I was too violent, it's true—but I'm sick. Don't be so hard, Sire! Think how much you have loved me, for how many years I have shared your life! We have had every-

thing in common! At this moment, when a new child links us more closely than ever, we mustn't separate for the caprice of an hour!

THE KING

You spoke of my age just now, Madam. It's true that I have known you for fifteen years. It's a long time for a love-affair. Adieu.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Louis!

[*The* KING *exits.*]

[SCENE VIII: MADAME DE MONTESPAN,—LA VOISIN.]

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Follows the* KING *with her eyes, panting, her body straining over the edge of the bed*]

No, it can't be. . . !

[*Puts her hand to her throat as though stifling*]

Ah!

[*Leaps out of bed and calls in an indistinct and strangled voice*]

Voisin!

[*Walks haltingly, swaying at each step, knocking against the furniture and grasping*

on to chairs which she overthrows, takes up some clothes, tries clumsily to put them on, stops suddenly seized with pains, all but faints.]

[*At the noise of the chair falling* La Voisin *and several women appear.*]

La Voisin

Eh! Madam what are you doing? . . . She'll fall!

[*The women rush to hold her.*]

Mme. de Montespan

[*Mechanically*] I want . . .

[*Tries to dress herself.*]

La Voisin

Go back to bed! You're shivering.

Mme. de Montespan

No! Help me. . . . I want . . .

La Voisin

You can't stand up.

Mme. de Montespan

[*In spite of her efforts, is forced to sit down*]

Ah! How dearly you have cost me: cursed be you!

[*She strikes her body in a frenzy.*]

La Voisin

You are killing yourself.

Mme. de Montespan

Cursed be my womb! Cursed what it has carried!

[*She sees her baby which* Marie-Aube *has carried in*]

Take it away! I can't look at it. It's horrible to me!

[Marie-Aube *gives the child to a woman and runs towards her.*]

Go away! All of you!

[*To* La Voisin]

You stay. Make them go.

La Voisin

[*To* Marie-Aube]

You'd better go. Don't antagonize her.

[*They all go out except* Voisin, *who comes back to* Madame de Montespan. *She is still trying obstinately to dress herself.*]

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Dress me. I can't.

LA VOISIN

[*Obeying*] What do you want to do?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Let us go! . . .

LA VOISIN

Where?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Where you wish to go.

LA VOISIN

The Black Mass?

[MADAME DE MONTESPAN *nods her head.*]

You've come to it at last!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

The power is escaping me; it's slipping from my fingers, they're too weak to hold it back. One instant more, and I will lose it forever. Help!

LA VOISIN

The situation has changed. I don't know if I can.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

What?

LA VOISIN

They're tracking us. The Police-Lieutenant is relentless in our pursuit. Just now Romani, one of our friends, confessed at the torture. I am suspected; I mustn't budge.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

You're going to refuse now?

LA VOISIN

I don't refuse. We must wait.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Wait! Wait! When the earth is crumbling beneath me!

LA VOISIN

You should have acted sooner.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Gasping, looks about her, then at herself, and takes off her bracelet*]

Here, take it, take it! . . . What more do you want? Whatever it is I will give it to you.

LA VOISIN

[*Looks at and fingers the bracelet*]
What good will it do me at the stake?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Are you going to abandon me?

LA VOISIN

Eh! Before thinking of you, I must think of myself!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Menacing*] Are you betraying me, are you with my enemies? . . . Take care, Voisin! Obey. I swear that if you refuse I will give you up to them.

LA VOISIN

You?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Yes.

LA VOISIN

To lose me is to lose yourself.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

I am lost in any case.

LA VOISIN

Very well; but if I am taken, I will not spare you either.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

You'll do it?

LA VOISIN

Yes. Whether they take me or not, at least I will have had before dying, the satisfaction I have been longing for.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

What's that?

LA VOISIN

I can tell you now. It's not a secret I imagine, either for you or me, that we have no great affection for each other; and we have no reason to help each other any further than our common interest finds it profitable.—I know you, I know this vain and hypocritical court; I know what is hidden in the bottom of your hearts: the profound bestiality of your thoughts. And I have enjoyed being able, in spite of you, to rub your noses in your own dirt, to bring you to the yoke of my Master. For years I have been waiting for this sensation.—To-day it is mine!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Lifting her hands to heaven*]
Heavens! How you humiliate me!—Remember that if you debase me in vain, if you don't give me the victory, I will kill you. . . . Let us go!

LA VOISIN

We must wait until night. The priest is there, I have notified Guibourg; I have the victim: everything is ready. It's twilight now. Come to the chapel. Lean on me.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

What am I doing? . . . I don't know. . . . Ah!

[*She groans, torn by a sudden pain.*]

LA VOISIN

Are you in pain?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Growing pale, clasping herself tightly, her arms crossed on her breast*]
I am dying; but let me die a Queen!

CURTAIN

ACT II

Scene I

Night.—A gallery in the Palace. The windows at the back look on to a court. To the left, a few steps lead to an oratory; its door is closed, and one sees the white window-panes with iron bars. The stage is half-dark, lighted only by the windows illumined from within and the flickering glimmer of a night-lamp, which burns at the foot of a statue of the Virgin, in a niche beside the door of the oratory. Little by little, moonlight penetrates the gallery.

Marie-Aube *enters gropingly. She sees the lighted windows of the oratory.*

Marie-Aube

Ah! . . . She's here! . . .

[*Goes rapidly towards the door, then stops*]

I must. . . .

[*Takes a few more steps, stretches out her hand to the door-knob, then withdraws it again*]

What am I afraid of? . . . . Courage!

[*Tries to open the door. In a whisper*]

The door's locked. . . .

[*She sits down on a step and begins to tremble without speaking; gets up*]

I must see!

[*Looks up at the lighted windows, goes up the steps again, and by holding on to the bars, succeeds in lifting herself up until her face is on a level with the window; but, just about to look, she turns her head away again*]

I don't dare. . . .

[*Looks, starts, and remains mute, eyes dilated, hands clutching the bars. One hears her gasp, and her teeth chatter in the silence. Finally she groans slightly, then trembles through her whole body. Her hands loosen. She falls in a faint.*]

[*Silence.*]

[*A clock strikes the quarter-hour. The moon, veiled until now, commences to illumine the scene. The light in the chapel goes out.*]

[Scene II: *The chapel door opens. A frightened man's face, fat and brutal-looking, peers out, and looks around slowly. Two women come out,*

one holding an indistinct and lugubrious form wrapped in a white sheet, the other carrying some napkins and stoles; after them the man, a priest, carrying a chalice which he hides under his cloak.—They hug the walls fearfully, glide along the gallery like birds of the night, and disappear.]

[MADAME DE MONTESPAN *appears. She looks around her wildly.* LA VOISIN, *who has followed her out, tries to give her her hand.*]

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Pushes her away*]

Don't touch me!

[LA VOISIN *shrugs her shoulders, grumbles, looks out at the sky and the court from the window of the gallery, and goes out.* MADAME DE MONTESPAN *walks on with uncertain and precipitated steps and stumbles against the body of her daughter*]

Ah!

[*Leans over her*]

Marie-Aube!

[*Kneels beside her*]

She has fainted! . . .

[*Lifts up her head and kisses her*]

Aube! My dearest Aube! . . .

[MARIE-AUBE *opens her eyes, looks at her mother, has a movement of fright, throws herself backwards violently, and hides her face.*]

What? I frighten you? . . . My darling, my little girl, it's I. . . . Why do you turn away from me? Why do you hide yourself? . . . Marie-Aube, look at me. . . .

MARIE-AUBE

[*As before*] No! No! . . . leave me alone!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Raises her head sharply, looks at the chapel-window above her, then at her daughter. After a moment of silence, in an altered voice*]

Aube . . . did you see? Look at me! . . . You saw.

[*She leans over her and pulls her hands away from her face.*]

MARIE-AUBE

[*Her face uncovered, but with eyes closed, turns her head away with instinctive repulsion*]

Please, Madam, please! Don't question me! Let me go. . . . I want to go away, I want to go to a convent. . . .

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Overcome, letting her go*]

You saw. . . . I am horrible to you.—[*Bitterly*] You are right.—Well, you will never despise me as much as I despise myself! . . . This king, this king for whom I have debased myself! I hate him for having forced me to it.

[*She turns away from her; and seated a few steps off, looks out into space with a desperate sadness*]

[MARIE-AUBE *raises her head, looks at her mother, and seized with a sudden rush of love and pity, is about to throw herself into her arms.*]

[MADAME DE MONTESPAN *recoils in her turn, fearfully, and pushes her away*]

No! Don't touch me! Go away from me! I soil everything I touch. Ah! If I could only tear myself out of myself! Where to flee this polluted body, the horror that wrings my entrails? . . . I feel upon me like a red-hot iron the mark

of the golden chalice and the eyes of that lascivious priest. . . .

MARIE-AUBE

[*Wrings her hands, weeping*]
Oh! How, how were you able to do it?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Sorrowfully*] I don't know, I don't know! . . . What have I done? How did I come here?—When I saw I was going to lose, that they were going to steal what I had wrested by a whole life of pains, I lost my reason, a madness pushed me. . . .

MARIE-AUBE

What was this precious thing you had gained? Was it Happiness?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Bitterly*] Happiness! There is no happiness! . . . Power is joyless; but it's torture to lose it. —Oh, you can't understand. . . . you don't know the bitter need to dominate. It isn't the glory of being above these beggars; it's the intolerable suffering of being here below, in the midst of them, this human cattle. Have you never felt the horror of a flock of sheep, those

stupid heads crushed by a century-old weight, that butcher's meat with its ignoble odor, where lamentable and grotesque plaints pass like a breath of wind? Thus men appear to me: beasts heaped up at the bottom of a well, howling and smelling, intermingled, stepping over each other with idiotic cries and laughs. In order to flee from them I clambered up the mountain above them on hands and knees; I slid, fell; but wounded, got up again; the odious voices faded away behind me, the air became less soiled, I perceived the luminous summits. Here they are! I have reached them! . . . And now, I must fall back again among these wretches! . . .

MARIE-AUBE

They are our fellow-men.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

They're not *my* fellow-men! They are made to obey, and I to command.

MARIE-AUBE

God alone commands, we are His instruments.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

The crowd is only dust swept by the wind. A

great soul is the wind which sweeps the dust, the very breath of God.

MARIE-AUBE

Power corrupts the soul.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Power purifies the soul. What corrupts, is base mediocrity, everything that demands a compromise, the hypocrisy of half-measures, half-actions, half-thoughts. There is only one crime in the world,—not to be one's self. God! When I realize that so many mediocre beings by their birth alone find themselves at the very top of the world, and that I must suffer so much to reach it! I am not there yet, and every step I gain is disputed by unworthy rivals,—this stupid little girl who wants to carry off my possession! My possession! I have a right to it. I will have it!

MARIE-AUBE

[*Sadly*] And afterwards?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Afterwards I am lost. It's the other world. But let me have this one! Death is far off.

MARIE-AUBE

Alas! Death is near, Mother.—Think—the years are passing!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Yes. That's the true Hell! To grow old! No torture can be compared to it. To feel your flesh slowly rot, see your body change with your own eyes, like a wall grown mouldy by humidity,—your skin turn yellow, your teeth spot, your face line up with burlesque and hideous wrinkles, where Death grimaces. . . . What has Hell ever invented like it? Oh! What ignominy! . . . And to think that nothing, nothing can arrest this living death! Each day it spreads over this beautiful body that is yours . . . that was yours, of which you were so proud. Sometimes I am so cowardly in the morning, when I dress, that I don't dare to look at myself: I'm afraid to see. . . . How stupid! . . . Beneath the make-up and clothes, the work of destruction continues with never a halt. If the eyes refuse to see, the implacable mind does not. The enemy reminds us of himself by a thousand dumb pains.—He travels silently in the sunken chest, the congested heart, the withered organs. What's the use of

struggling? One is weary of this vain combat. There is nothing left but to lie down on the earth and die. I pass whole nights weeping in despair. . . . But what have I done, what have I done, to see this flesh that I loved, spoil and die? Only an instant ago I was still like you. You don't understand, you think there is a world between us. . . . You will see for yourself: as far away as it seems, one has hardly begun to live before it is already finished.

MARIE-AUBE

It's the law: why revolt against it?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Because it is the law! What have I to do with a law? Why does it crush me? Have I signed a pact? Why do they impose upon me a law that is not made for me? Let slaves bow before the shame of growing old, let them adore it if they wish to, as a sacred necessity. As for me, I vomit it!

MARIE-AUBE

Everything passes, old age like the rest. A day will come when the body and soul will flower again.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

I don't believe in those dreams.

MARIE-AUBE

Don't blaspheme!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

It isn't I that blaspheme, it's those who believe such a cowardly God can exist. . . . This God of hospitals and charnel-houses! What Roman Cæsar ever enjoyed more ignoble games than his! One would say that he takes pleasure in inventing beings in order to make them suffer, and degrade them. But what a taste he has for ugliness and death! To make of an adolescent, radiant with hope, a faded old woman, and of a juvenile body, a stinking ordure, what a triumph! And what respect we ought to have for the executioner!

MARIE-AUBE

[*Supplicating*] Mother, Mother, you break my heart!

[*Closes her mother's mouth with her hand.*]

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Looking at her with a strange smile*]

How young you are! How happy you are to be young!

MARIE-AUBE

Don't look at me that way, Madam! Your eyes frighten me: they hate me.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Continuing to look at her with envy and pity*]

Oh, to be like that again just two years more,—just two years!

MARIE-AUBE

I wish I could give you this body you envy!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

What has it done to you?

MARIE-AUBE

It's a burden. Still so many more years to defend myself! I want it to be over.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Life is too strong a wine for your head. It frightens you?

MARIE-AUBE

It's odious to me.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Because of me, isn't it so?

MARIE-AUBE

Not only you, Madam.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Bitterly*] Not only me?

MARIE-AUBE

What have I said? It isn't so. . . .

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Yes it is.—Then, I make you suffer?

MARIE-AUBE

[*In a low voice*] Yes.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Tell me everything.

MARIE-AUBE

I can't. Oh, how I detest life! That it should have made of you, you whom I love, you whom I admire in spite of everything . . .

[*Stops*]

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Well?

MARIE-AUBE

[*After a silence, starts to take her hands*]
Pardon me.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Disengaging herself gently*] Your silence is crueller than any words. I have deserved it. It's right.

MARIE-AUBE

No, no, you are mistaken. I love you, I love you! That's why I can't endure anything that lessens you.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Looking at her with surprise*]
You love me, in spite of everything?

MARIE-AUBE

[*With intense passion*]
More than everything, Madam.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

How can you? I have hardly loved you at all. I have never done anything for you.

MARIE-AUBE

You don't know all you have been to me since my childhood. . . . I didn't see you often. You

sent us away from you. But they spoke to me of you, I dreamed of you, Madam. Your portrait was in my room; I adored it, gazed at it, talked to it. When I was alone, I got up on the chair to kiss it. And the days you came to see me, my heart used to beat for joy. . . .

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Smiling sadly*] I was very cold and hurried. I looked at you harshly and had hardly arrived before I thought of leaving.

MARIE-AUBE

. . . Then I came to court. I was happy to be near you, to live in your light, to breathe the same air. But I felt myself to be ugly and gauche beside you, I was afraid of displeasing you, and that froze me. What I liked best was to hide myself in some corner of your room, behind a curtain, and look at you when the King, the Court, and the ambassadors were assembled about you, surrounding you with homage. It seemed to me that everyone loved you as I did, and my soul was flooded with joy. . . . Then one day . . . I was still a child, I was playing with my brother, Monsieur the Duke of Vexin, in the gallery on the first floor. The window was open. In the

garden below, two gentlemen were talking. . . . I thought they were our friends! I listened to what they said. . . . Oh! Madam!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Violently*] Who was it?

MARIE-AUBE

I don't know.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Insistently*] Was it Monsieur de Gesvres?

MARIE-AUBE

No, I won't tell. What's the use? They are all the same, you know it well. I have realized it since. But then,—it was harrowing to me. I didn't understand very well all the villainous things they said, but it served to teach me so much of which I was ignorant. Since that moment I have looked at everything with different eyes; I know what those smiles and flatteries amount to. I have also learned to see your tears. My God! How can you live this way, you who are so proud?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Despondently*] What would you have me do?

MARIE-AUBE

Leave them, Mother dear, come with me, come into retreat, far from Court, in God. One breathes freely, one doesn't grow old in God. The days pass, the soul flowers like an eternal spring. It is a love that doesn't deceive, and is safe from jealousies; the more one shares it, the greater is the part of each. Oh! How sweet it would be to love Him with you, to dream of Him together, down there in our province, in the midst of the great woods, to the sound of the church-bells of our villages, and the tranquil fountains!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Looking long at her daughter, and smiling with melancholy*]

Poor little dreamer, what you're saying is mad; it's a mental illusion. I know it. But I love it. I love your purity. If your dreams are not true, your tears are true, your love is true. My darling, your goodness melts my heart; it doesn't recognize itself any longer; you make it feel the happiness of loving for the first time. Let me look at you! I have never seen you before. . . . How fresh you are! Your skin is like a tissue of

flowers; the tears that make an old woman like me ugly, are as dew on your cheeks. . . . Don't turn away. I'm not jealous now. Aren't you myself? How strange and sweet it is that you should be I, my fruit and flesh! How is it that I had to wait till now, to taste the consoling charm of reliving in you! Where am I? Here, or there? Oh my youth, laugh with me, don't be sad, don't be sad through me! I will do what you wish, all that you wish, my love, even if it is absurd, so that you shall be happy, that I shall be happy in you, so that mirroring my poor tired face and eyes in thy eyes, in thy heart, O my fountain of youth, I can see smiling there the candid reflection of thy young face. . . .

MARIE-AUBE

Mother, then, you'll do it? . . .

MME. DE MONTESPAN

We will leave tomorrow.

MARIE-AUBE

[*Intensely*] Oh! Thank you!

[*Embraces her.*]

[*Loud noise of voices outside.*]

What is happening?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Go back quickly, don't let them find you here.

MARIE-AUBE

But you?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Smiling at her, suddenly perceives the face of* LA VOISIN, *hidden in a corner of the gallery. Her voice changes abruptly*]

I don't need any one, I will go back alone. . . . Go. . . .

[MARIE-AUBE *runs off on tiptoes, blowing her a kiss.*]

[SCENE III: MME. DE MONTESPAN, LA VOISIN; *later some* GENTLEMEN.

LA VOISIN

[*Runs to her, frightened*]

Madam, we are lost!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

What?

LA VOISIN

They were spying on us. The Police-Lieutenant has been playing with us for weeks. A constable was waiting, hidden near the door. I suspected

it. I let Guibourg and La Poulain go ahead. They had hardly gotten out before they were upon them. They ran, they're chasing them.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

They saw you?

LA VOISIN

No. But it is a matter of hours. If Guibourg is taken, he will speak. I know him. He has nothing more to hope, nothing to fear. He will denounce us all.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Wretch! That's what you've brought me to! It's for that, that I have debased myself.

LA VOISIN

It's not for you to reproach us! We have lost ourselves for you.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Silence! They're coming. . . . Ah! If they could only escape.

[MADAME DE MONTESPAN *and* LA VOISIN *hide themselves in a dark corner near the statue of the Virgin.*]

[*Some* GENTLEMEN *rush in from both sides*

of the gallery, and lean out of the windows to see what is going on. Outside, the tumult redoubles.]

THE GENTLEMEN

—It's here in the court.

—What is it?

—Some blackguards they are chasing, two women and a man.

—What have they done?

—They say they are sorcerers. They came out of the palace.

—The palace? We will learn fine things tomorrow.

—They are running like hares. Look at that fat priest with his short legs. How he trots along the court with the spies at his heels! The imbecile will let himself be cornered. Look, I told you so! There he is, driven into the corner! Well! What's he doing? He's snatching a cudgel from a lackey! He's belaboring them with blows! Zounds! What a fist! They don't dare advance!

—Bravo!

—The Swiss is going to run him through with his pike.

—Yes! . . . No! . . . What a ferocious beast! He's throwing them down. . . . He's climbing up the scaffolding. There's a madman! They're climbing after him; but he's more agile; he's gaining, he's ahead; he's on the edge of the roof. He's going to escape!

—The musketeer below is loading his gun. He's aiming. Well, what's he waiting for?

—Shoot, shoot, you fool!

[*A shot is heard.*]

MME. DE MONTESPAN *and* LA VOISIN

[*Having followed this conversation without seeing the speakers, with an anguish which underlines every detail, seize each other by the hand*]

My God! Let him be killed!

[*Outside, an uproar of cries and laughs.*]

THE GENTLEMEN

—Hit! He's sliding, he's falling!

—Bang! What a tumble!

—Is he dead?

[*After a moment*]

—No, he's moving. Hear him yell.

—Let's go and see. . . .

[*They go out precipitately*]

[Madame de Montespan *and* La Voisin *run to the window, hastily, fearfully*]

Mme. de Montespan

He's caught, they're carrying him off.

La Voisin

It's over.

[*Sinks to the ground.*]

Mme. de Montespan

This hubbub will waken the King. In a moment he'll know all. And Fontanges, Fontanges, what joy for her tomorrow! Ah! . . . You have sorceries! Do something, come on!

[*Shakes* La Voisin.]

La Voisin

I can't. The Master is tired. He has gone away.

Mme. de Montespan

Force him to obey you!

La Voisin

[*With fatalism*] He is the Master.

Mme. de Montespan

Let us fly, then.

LA VOISIN

What's the good? They will take us again tomorrow. When the Master abandons you, there is nothing more to do. We are lost.

[*Weeps.*]

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Cease your wails. What's the use of groaning?

LA VOISIN

Do you consider the tortures that await me?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Since you were born, haven't you been doomed to the stake?

LA VOISIN

It isn't the same thing to risk death, and to see it before one's eyes.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Coward!

LA VOISIN

It's easy for you to talk. You don't risk anything, people of your sort. They burn the beggars; but the great escape. They don't dare strike them.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

For people of our sort there are tortures worse than those of the executioner.

LA VOISIN

What?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

To be vanquished!

LA VOISIN

What's that, compared to red-hot pincers?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Ah! If a piece of red-hot iron could suffice to blot out shame!

LA VOISIN

Those are mere words. You will be allowed to retire to your château in the country, you'll say a few devotions to rest your soul, and continue to eat fatly, sleep in good beds, and have yourself caressed by your lovers; while I . . .

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Do you think I'll resign myself, leave the field free and let this girl take my place? . . . Fly? . . . Never! Who spoke of retiring? Yes, a moment ago. . . . Now everything is changed. One can retreat voluntarily, the victor. But

vanquished, scorned, to fly before their jeers, to collapse beneath their outrages! I would die, rather than yield.

LA VOISIN

Pooh! I know you: you'll come to an understanding, you'll compromise. Besides—if you do die, what's that to me? You do it for your pleasure; no one forces you.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

You are too vile to comprehend what a soul like mine can suffer.

LA VOISIN

So much the better! You can never suffer too much.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Why do you hate me?

LA VOISIN

I don't hate you. But I suffer less when I know I have company.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Wouldn't it lessen your pain if you could revenge yourself on your enemies?

LA VOISIN

Yes.—But how? And whom to strike? I have nothing but enemies. If I should wreak vengeance on two or three, there would always be others. . . .

MME. DE MONTESPAN

But if instead of striking a few nobodies, one should go straight to those who are worth millions of men?

LA VOISIN

Whom?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

If one should strike . . . ?

LA VOISIN

[*In a low voice*]

The King?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Yes.

[*A short silence.*]

LA VOISIN

What you propose, my daughter, is terrible.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

I won't have him survive his scorn for me.

LA VOISIN

Kill the King!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

You tremble?

LA VOISIN

It's nothing. . . . As all is lost, it would be well to finish there. But do you realize what awaits us afterwards, the tortures?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

There are always ways of escaping from life.

LA VOISIN

How do you wish him to be struck?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

In the morning, when he works, he usually takes a glass of rossolis.

LA VOISIN

Good! Legros and Bertrand watch over his drinks. I know them. They will put in what's necessary.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Do it quickly, lest my will go back on me!

LA VOISIN

Be easy, I will serve him like a king. And Fontanges?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

I'll take care of her.

[LA VOISIN *exits.*]

The thunder growls in my temples. . . . I want to stop. . . . No!—Forward! O God! Where are you leading me? . . .

CURTAIN

ACT III

Scene I

The King's *study.* Louis XIV *is seated before a large table.* Louvois, *seated on the other side, is reading. There is a flagon of wine on a small round table a few feet from the* King, *and a praying-desk in a corner, before a picture of Christ on the cross.*
Time: The following morning.

Louvois

Your Majesty seems preoccupied. Shall I interrupt my report and return this evening?

The King

No, Monsieur, continue,—go on to the end.

Louvois

In conformance with Your Majesty's orders, Baron Montclar entered Strasbourg on Wednesday. There was no resistance. No one expected his arrival. The gates were open, the ramparts

bare of cannon. The Marshall ordered the decree of the Sovereign Chamber of Brisach, annexing Strasbourg to France, to be read on the public common. Everything took place in perfect order and without a protest. We had merely to hang three or four rascals who were making a scandal, as an example. This conquest renders Your Majesty definitely master of all Alsace and closes the Kingdom forever to the barbarians. "Clausa Germanis Gallia!"—At the same time the news I receive from Italy leads me to believe that Monsieur de Catinat will enter Cascal today. Thus continues that conquest of the world in full peace time, which strikes Your Majesty's enemies dumb, and shall be the admiration of centuries to come.

THE KING

You will give orders, Monsieur, that a "Te Deum" be sung in all the churches of France. We must offer to God what belongs to Him. Our glory is His. It is for Him that we conquer.

LOUVOIS

Your Majesty's greatness lies in this: that the cause of God is allied to yours. What is God's is the King's.

THE KING

Mine, Monsieur? There are moments when I ask myself if any thing belongs to me, except myself. My armies conquer Europe yet I am not even master of what I see, hardly of what I touch.

[*He touches mechanically the table with the flagon.*]

LOUVOIS

Your Majesty must be overwhelmed with some profound sorrow; for it is the first time I have heard you express yourself so bitterly.

THE KING

I know the baseness of human nature, when deprived of the help of God, it is left to itself. It needs some inflexible power to constantly repress its savage instincts. I saw in my childhood, during that troublous time when subjects dared to rebel against the throne, the aberrations of men who want to dispense with a master. But I thought twenty years of noble discipline had succeeded in killing these germs of folly. I can't hide my astonishment upon learning by this shameful affair of poisoners and sorcerers that beneath the apparent brilliance of my prosperity,

the plague continues to ripen. Why, the mud has been mounting to the very steps of my throne!

LOUVOIS

These are passing crises: the most flourishing reigns cannot escape them. As long as a people remains young it must sow its wild oats. It is necessary to provide a vast field for its energy, where its overflowing spirits can have an outlet; and then one should keep it constantly on the alert.

THE KING

The idleness of Versailles has its dangers, no doubt, for these ardent spirits who have need of action; but experience has shown that these same people would be a far greater danger to the armies; for they have at their disposal a force which would corrupt the soldiers. Moreover, the evil has gone too deep for it to be possible to cure it with ordinary means. The whole court is infected. Every day the venom spreads.

LOUVOIS

We must make two or three resounding strokes and then hush it up. Example is efficacious with the common herd. But it isn't by bagging a few

of these wretches that we will succeed in reaching public opinion. We must go straight to the *heads*, without regard for the lustre of names, or services rendered; not only is a great lord who is guilty, guiltier than a commoner, but his chastisement is more profitable, on account of its notoriety.

THE KING

Your advice is in accord with my own thoughts, but a thousand reasons arise in me to combat *my* reason, and hold it in suspense. I see myself stopped by considerations of family and sentiment, which these crimes have not yet been able to completely efface from my mind.

LOUVOIS

It would be most proper of Your Majesty to suppress your natural kindness if the public interest demands it.

THE KING

Madame de Montespan touches you also very nearly: you have affianced one of vour daughters to her nephew.

LOUVOIS

What, Sire, it is Madame de Montespan who is in question?

THE KING

Last night they arrested three poisoners who were leaving the palace; these people accused Madame de Montespan of having taken part in their crimes.

LOUVOIS

Eh, Sire, what guarantee does the word of such scoundrels offer?

THE KING

Monsieur de la Reynie seems to believe in it.

LOUVOIS

The magistrate is obsessed. He sees criminals everywhere. It's a mania common to his species. After twenty years in office they are totally incapable of seeing things as they are. Their dark and distorted imaginations substitute bad novels for reality, where the stiletto, poison, and all the artifices of a base literature take the place of human motives.

THE KING

You will see him yourself. I gave orders for him to wait upon me in the next room as soon as he has any new revelations. See if he is there.

[LOUVOIS *opens the door.*]

LOUVOIS

Sire, he is here.

THE KING

Kindly ask him to come in.

[*Enter* LA REYNIE.]

[SCENE II: *The* KING, LOUVOIS *and* LA REYNIE.]

THE KING

[*To* LA REYNIE] Well, Monsieur. did they confirm their confessions?

LA REYNIE

Sire, I am overwhelmed with what I have just heard. It is in fear and trembling that I dare report it to Your Majesty.

[*Silence.*]

[*The* KING *bows his head, and makes a sign to* LA REYNIE *to speak.*]

An hour ago we laid hands on the most dangerous criminal, the woman Voisin, who has either directed or conceived every one of these atrocities. She came out of the palace impudently enough, without even trying to hide herself. When arrested, she volunteered with frightening calm, a full confession.

THE KING

She too involves the Marquise de Montespan?

LA REYNIE

She accuses her of more terrible things than any of the others.

LOUVOIS

Those are the usual tactics of these rascals: they defend themselves by accusing others.

LA REYNIE

They questioned her again before me. She not only repeated her statements, but made them even more damning.

LOUVOIS

One must torture people of that kind to *prevent* them from speaking, not to force them to. Their natural perversity inclines them only too readily to lie and defame.

LA REYNIE

Do you believe, Monseigneur, that an old magistrate like myself would be so lacking in caution as to accept without verification the denunciations of a criminal, above all when they attack what is

most sacred in the world? I would be more criminal than she if I did not take care to confirm everyone of her assertions. I had Madame la Marquise's women questioned: all the testimonies accord with those of the woman Voisin.

LOUVOIS

Let us not forget, Monsieur, that the Marquise has been gravely ill for several weeks, and that there is reason to attribute to this morbid state the acts of which she has been accused.

LA REYNIE

Alas! I would have been only to happy to find this excuse. Unfortunately the incriminating facts go much further back than these last few months. She has been engaging in these practises for fifteen years. She had hardly arrived at court, when we see her have recourse to sorceries in order to win Your Majesty's favor. She was already at that time in relations with the woman Voisin, who furnished her with philtres and poisons. These powders, composed of obnoxious ingredients were on different occasions mixed with Your Majesty's food; and the doctors were able to ascertain with me that the nefarious attempts coincided each time with Your Majesty's ill-

nesses. That isn't all. At the church of Saint-Séverin, at the Château of Villebousin, at Versailles itself, Madame de Montespan and her accomplices gave themselves up to criminal conjurations to make the Queen and Mademoiselle de Vallière die. Finally, the Marquise's fury has augmented day by day with her power and the fear of losing it. My mouth refuses to describe the horror of the crimes into which this unfortunate being has fallen: only last night in the chapel, lying nude upon the altar, the holy sacrifice celebrated on her body, the august host consecrated with human blood. . . . Sire, I cease and conclude, penetrated with fear and grief: it is necessary to arrest the Marquise de Montespan at once.

LOUVOIS

Impossible. The Marquise is not an ordinary woman. One cannot touch her without hurting the State.

LA REYNIE

The State is very much more hurt by her crimes. If they are not punished, nothing can be punished.

LOUVOIS

The *scandal* will be worse than the crimes them-

selves. Think of the fame of this affair throughout Europe. What joy for the nations that hate us and await indefatigably the occasion to precipitate Your Majesty from your glory!

La Reynie

There is more danger that the revelations will come first from our enemies. Such criminal attempts cannot remain secret long. Let us forestall rumor and let Europe learn at the same time of the crime and the punishment.

Louvois

I admire, Monsieur, the ease with which you resign yourself to an act that rends the heart of him whose happiness it is our duty to guard.

La Reynie

Monsieur, one should not shirk a duty because it is painful to fulfill. I believe that an honest man should accomplish it as a matter of pride, and all the more so if it costs him more. Do you suppose I have reached this opinion without struggles? Sire, must I tell you of the torments I endured last night? While that poor wretch was submitting to the question, my heart submitted

to it with her; each one of her confessions was like a dagger-thrust. I found myself suddenly the possessor of a terrible secret, upon which the State depended; and I saw an equal danger in suppressing and in spreading it. I knew what a misfortune it might be for the kingdom; but I also knew that in keeping it to myself I was injuring the supreme kingdom of Justice. Sire, I knew how I would have to pierce your heart; but I knew that I was forbidden to spare it, that this was a matter of your honor. Ah, Sire, this noble office of Defender of the Law, that I was so proud of having received from you, how much, since yesterday, have I not suffered from its oppressive distinction! I felt myself on the point of renouncing it, of begging Your Majesty to relieve me of a task that I was no longer able to fulfill, I knew no longer where my duty lay. I prayed to God, I besought Him to enlighten me, to make me forget my personality, to speak in my place; and He answered me that I should not thrust upon others a dangerous duty, but should accomplish it myself, in spite of my heart, whatever it might cost me, for the honor of Justice, and the glory of Your Majesty.

[*Very much moved, he throws himself at the*

feet of the KING, *who, equally moved, motions to him to rise.*]

LOUVOIS

A miserable glory, Monsieur that toward which you are working!

LA REYNIE

[*Getting up proudly*]

One must *be* great, not appear so!

[MME. DE MONTESPAN *enters, and advances impetuously towards the* KING. LOUVOIS *and* LA REYNIE *start with surprise.*]

[SCENE III: *The* KING, MADAME DE MONTESPAN.]

THE KING

[*Rising, startled and irritated*]

Madame de Montespan!

[*He motions with his hand to* LOUVOIS *and* LA REYNIE, *who bow and retire without speaking.*]

Who has authorized you, Madam, to come without having been sent for?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

My *rights* have authorized me!

THE KING

You *have* none here, any longer.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

They don't depend on you.

THE KING

You had none except through me.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

I have conquered them, and I will keep them.

THE KING

Do you dare in such a moment . . . ?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

The moment is truly grave for both of us. If I come, it is not only because of my honor which is attacked,—it is a remnant of affection that brings me: take care what you do. Let us not, either of us, say irremediable things. Let us both control ourselves.

THE KING

I think I must be dreaming when I hear this imperious language. It is you who threaten?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

My pride warns yours. A greater danger has never menaced us.

THE KING

Do you forget that your crimes are known to me?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

So much the better! I don't need to confess them to you.

THE KING

Is it true then? These poisons, these sorceries, these atrocious and despicable crimes, they are your work?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Our work, Sire. Yours and mine.

THE KING

Are you losing your senses? What do you dare to say?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

I say that if I have dishonored myself, soiled myself with every sort of crime, it is because you have forced me to it. Your ingratitude, your lust,

your egotism have driven me to extremes. It's been a pleasure to you to make me desperate. For fifteen years there hasn't been a day when my mind could rest with confidence in yours; not one, when I hadn't constantly to struggle in order not to be destroyed by you. For you it was merely the game of a bored and capricious tyrant whose pleasure it was to take away with one hand what he gave with the other, to threaten my rights, to bait my pride. You drove me frantic. I had to defend myself. I did it with crimes. Let them fall on your own head.

THE KING

But what do I owe you, Madam? I took you from the country, and showered you with favors. Nothing equaled your insignificance, unless it was your ambition. For fifteen years I have gorged this ambition of yours with possessions and honors. A swarm of effeminate relations, debtors, and intriguers have fattened on my favors. Nothing belongs to you, not even the shirt on your back. What are you, to demand anything of me?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Your wife.

THE KING

The Queen is my wife.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Don't be absurd! That idiotic old Spaniard who spends her days with her confessors and her dogs! What has she in common with you, but the bed now and then, when I permit it, in the interest of the State!—It is I who am the Queen. I have shared all your thoughts. Your ministers, your generals have conferred with me. You consulted me on your most secret affairs. My decision was worth half yours.

THE KING

It's true. You owe me everything.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Do you forget my passionate love of your fame? I have watched over it more jealously than you. To make you great was my ardent and incessant desire. There is nothing I would not have sacrificed to accomplish it. I was your will-power, always on the alert, with never a moment's rest until you should arrive at the top. Under me,

vanquished Europe has submitted to the laws which you have pleased to dictate. France shines with fortune and power. I have taken nothing from you that I haven't returned a thousand-fold.

THE KING

Your monstrous vanity blinds you, Madam: you did nothing except through me. You exist by my pleasure. What I have done I can undo.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

You were able to give a great mind the chance of becoming conscious of its greatness. No one is able to take away this consciousness.

THE KING

I have had greater servants than you, Madam. When it has pleased me to have them go, they have quietly bowed and left.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Yes, your discipline has succeeded marvellously in domesticating souls. Versailles is peopled with valets.—But my spirit is of another kind and thinks to do you honor when it claims from you the independence of the woman you have loved.

THE KING

[*Drily*] I love you no longer.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Well! I have never loved you.

THE KING

[*Piqued*] Spite is making you lose your temper. I remember your protestations of love.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

I love the King, not you.

THE KING

You are very bold to tell me so.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

I tell you what you ought to know, if you would only consent to brush aside the thick cloud of flattery which blinds and stupefies you. It is Royalty that creates your beauty and your virtues. Who loves you for yourself?

THE KING

This is too much; I have borne too long your ambition, your violence, that nasty mood of yours which attacks everything it pleases me to like and

distinguish at court. Can't you realize what it has cost me, to endure near me a woman like you, whose every movement reveals her inherent coarseness: that raucous Italian voice, those common gestures, that odor of the antechamber which you drag after you, that need of low words, which flow out of your mouth like a muddy river, all that vulgarity which you sweat out of every pore, the madness, in short, of a debauched nature, that shows its baseness even in love, which it vilifies!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Very likely I'm all that and more! But at least I don't smell as bad as you. Hasn't your new mistress told you? . . . Look at yourself and judge yourself, with your bald red head, decayed teeth, your ulcers and gout, your heartlessness and lack of conversation! Do you think a woman like myself hasn't suffered from you, and that I haven't greater merit in enduring you, than you have in bearing my vices? I have silenced my repugnance, the revolt of body and soul, and the overwhelming boredom which stifled me in your presence, in order to see only the grandeur of the King, and the hard-won fame in the task to which you were consecrated.—You say my company has

weighed on you. . . . Good God! What was yours to me! Were you so infatuated with the pompous disposal of your favors that you didn't feel the aversion of my flesh for yours? Your kisses made me sick, my senses bellowed with disgust. But I hate you, I hate you! I have hated you for fifteen years! Don't you understand?

THE KING

[*Overwhelmed*] What! Such hate, such blind fury in a being I have loaded with my favors, who protested she loved me! . . . Great Heavens! Whom to believe in now?—I thank you, Madam, for having finally enlightened me upon your sentiments for me. You have just pronounced your own sentence. In a moment you will be arrested.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

You won't dare. You can't strike me without striking yourself.

THE KING

Nothing attaches me to you any longer. You are alone, you have no ties. A word from me is enough,—and I will say it,—for Justice to take you to account for all your crimes.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

I am attached to the throne by indestructible ties: my six children.

THE KING

When Justice speaks, blood is silent.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Oh, it isn't your affection for them that will deter you, I know, since you love nothing but yourself; it's your pride. Every blow that strikes me will strike you six times over.

THE KING

These innocents are not responsible for your depravity. Your children are no longer yours. I shall take them from you.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

You can't. They are marked forever with my name and yours. All your protestations will only serve to publish abroad the part of my shame that falls to their lot. I defy you to hurt me without hurting them.

THE KING

Very well, I will strike them, yes, I will break

them if need be, rather than not to break your rebellious pride.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

All right, let them be dishonored with me, then, provided you have your part in our ignominy!

[MARIE-AUBE, *who has come in a few seconds before without being seen by the* KING *or* MADAME DE MONTESPAN, *throws herself on her knees before them, stretching out her arms.*]

[SCENE IV: *The* KING, MADAME DE MONTESPAN, MARIE-AUBE.]

MARIE-AUBE

Spare us!

THE KING

My daughter!

[*He goes toward her.*]

MARIE-AUBE

[*Seizing his hand*]

What have I done to you? You hate me! You want to ruin me!

THE KING

Here is your victim, Madam!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

It is you who strike her.

THE KING

[*To* MARIE-AUBE] Come, don't cry, my dear. You are punished for your curiosity. How did you get in?

MARIE-AUBE

Ah! Sire, I knew you were angry with each other, I was afraid. Please forgive each other.

THE KING

It doesn't concern you. Go back to your room, Mademoiselle. Your place is not here.

MARIE-AUBE

Don't send me away! Where shall I go if you repulse me? The only place I have is in your arms. I have no other family, no friends, I have only you, I love you both. If you are enemies, you will destroy me, I can't live!

THE KING

You have heard things you should never have known. I would have liked to spare you. But since the evil is done, try to forget it, and believe that your father loves you.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Of what use is it to surround oneself with lies? It only victimizes people in the end. Better to rend your heart and see the world as it is: life's ferocity, the baseness of mankind. Look at us, despise us, and try to do better.

THE KING

Eh, Madam, you will kill her.

MARIE-AUBE

Oh, why did you make me live then if life is like this? I am not strong enough. You love the fight so much that you find a savor even in hate and scorn. But they overwhelm me. I need to love, to respect . . . and I can't any more, I can't any more! Ah! Sire, what a dreary present you gave me! And you too, Madam! Why did you love each other? Was it just, that you should have condemned me to this anguish, merely for your amusement and ambition?

[*She weeps at the feet of the* KING. *The* KING *and* MADAME DE MONTESPAN *remain a moment, mute and overcome.* MADAME DE MONTESPAN *leans over* MARIE-

AUBE *to console her.* MARIE-AUBE *on her knees, hides her face in her mother's dress without releasing the hand of the* KING, *who looks at her with pity.*]

THE KING

What do you want me to do, my daughter?

MARIE-AUBE

Forgive her!

THE KING

It doesn't concern me alone. Fortunately you don't know what has happened.

MARIE-AUBE

Yes, I know . . .

THE KING

You know what your mother has done?

MARIE-AUBE

[*Troubled*] No, Sire, I am wrong, I don't know, I don't know anything. . . .

[MADAME DE MONTESPAN *instinctively draws away from her daughter.*]

THE KING

I can sacrifice my natural resentments. I cannot sacrifice Justice.

MARIE-AUBE

Pronounce in its place!

THE KING

Well, for your sake, Marie, I will consent to save her from her judges, but she must chastise herself, she must leave the court at once and retire to a convent.

MARIE-AUBE

[*Eagerly*] Oh, Sire, is that all? And will you pardon her if she obeys?

THE KING

Perhaps, some day,—we shall see.

MARIE-AUBE

She will do it, Sire, she has promised me.

THE KING

You have promised your daughter, Madam?

MARIE-AUBE

She wanted to leave, herself. Isn't it true, Madam, that you told me so?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

It is true. I had promised this child: last night

I had decided to go; but I wanted to do so freely, my head high, by my will not yours. To-day everything has changed, you are turning me out. I cannot descend to such base submission. I will remain.

THE KING

Then let Justice take you!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Let it take me! It will hear some strange revelations.

THE KING

Is your soul hardened to all shame?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

The worst shame is that of the dog, cringing under the blows.

MARIE-AUBE

Mother, have pity on us and on yourself!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Don't look at me with those grieving eyes! They follow me like remorse.

MARIE-AUBE

You promised me. You gave me your word,

Madam. Do you want me not to believe in you any more? Oh! I couldn't stand it. I will die if you too have deceived me.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Be quiet, don't ask me anything: I couldn't refuse you. Don't be the accomplice of my enemies!

MARIE-AUBE

Please, please, I want it, you must! . . .

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*To the* KING] You win. This innocent girl is the instrument of your despotism. I can't resist her sad and tender looks. I will go if she wishes, if you say the word. Take care, don't say it; for the last time I warn you. Don't push me to the brink! The abyss is near.

THE KING

[*In a hard tone*] You will go to your estates; you will not leave them within a radius of ten miles. You will not see any of your children, except as a last indulgence, Mademoiselle de Blois, who will have permission to visit you fifteen days a year. You will remain there till your death praying and imploring the mercy of God.

MARIE-AUBE

[*Imploring*] Sire! . . .

THE KING

It is my decree.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Then may Destiny take its course!

MARIE-AUBE

Sire, won't you say at least one affectionate word to her before she goes?

THE KING

I have no longer either affection or hate for her, I ask only to forget this woman, I blot her out of my life.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

My love is like the tunic of Nessus: one can't tear it off without tearing oneself.

THE KING

[*Shrugging his shoulders*]
Adieu, Madam.

[*He turns his back on her, walks mechanically to the little table, and pours out a glass*

of wine. MADAME DE MONTESPAN *looks at him; her eyes cannot hide their flame.* MARIE-AUBE *is struck by it; she follows her mother's glance, looks at the* KING, *the glass he holds, then back at* MME. DE MONTESPAN *again. She opens her mouth, takes a step toward her mother, starts to speak, then makes up her mind and goes rapidly toward the* KING.]

MARIE-AUBE

Sire, let me drink.

THE KING

[*Holding out his glass to her*]

Take it, my child.

[MADAME DE MONTESPAN, *horror-struck, barely restrains a cry; she hastily approaches her daughter and takes her by the hand.* MARIE-AUBE *looks at her without speaking.*]

What is it?

[MARIE-AUBE *puts the glass to her lips.* MME. DE MONTESPAN, *after a fraction of hesitation, drags it out of her hand and drinks it down at one draught.*]

MME. DE MONTESPAN

No!

MARIE-AUBE

What have you done?—It isn't . . . it isn't . . . ?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Don't fear. I saw what you were thinking. Poor little girl! I understand you.

MARIE-AUBE

Oh! Forgive me! Forgive me!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

You couldn't bear to despise me, could you?

MARIE-AUBE

I need to respect you to keep my faith in you.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Thank you. Don't lose it, whatever happens.

THE KING

What does this mean?

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Everything conspires to defeat me. God is striking me. Well, I am glad. It means I'm saved! I'm emerging, escaping from the hellish vortex!

Oh! God! How was I able to tear myself out of its grip? I need to feel it was inevitable—inevitable. If it weren't already done, I couldn't do it again.—It *is* done. Nothing in the world can change it now. I almost sacrificed Aube, too. Reason couldn't save me. Destiny is all, and I am its victim. The monsters in my breast are in their death-throes. . . .

MARIE-AUBE

I knew it! . . . Oh!

[*She supports her mother, weeping.*]

THE KING

But what *is* it?

MARIE-AUBE

Sire, don't you see that she is dying?

THE KING

Dying?—Good God!—But then, this glass, this wine! . . . It was *I* she wanted? . . . Christ!! You have saved me!

[*He kneels down on his praying-desk, in front of the picture of the Crucifixion, and prays ardently.*]

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Bitterly*] Look at him: even at such a time, he thinks only of himself.

MARIE-AUBE

[*Beside herself*] Help! Help!

MME. DE MONTESPAN

Peace, there is no help.

THE KING

[*To* MARIE-AUBE] Be quiet, unhappy girl, don't call!

MARIE-AUBE

[*Desperately*] She's dying. Help! . . .

THE KING

Be still! I want it. *She must die.*

[SCENE V. *The doors open, and people of the court, curious and frightened, enter, stare, crowd forward.*]

[MADAME DE MONTESPAN *is lying on a couch, in the arms of her daughter.*]

THE COURTIERS

—What's the matter? . . .
—Is the King ill? . . .

—Some one screamed. . . .
—The Marquise has fainted. . . .
—Call Doctor Fagon!

THE KING

[*Very calmly*] Madame de Montespan is not feeling very well. Be kind enough to withdraw. Let her have some air.

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*To her daughter, at whom she gazes with passionate tenderness*]

You have saved me! . . .

[*She kisses* MARIE-AUBE'S *hand*]

MLLE. DE FONTANGES

[*Breaks through the crowd of courtiers assembled at the door, and rushes in, very much moved*]

What has happened?—Oh! Madam! . . .

MME. DE MONTESPAN

[*Raising herself up and looking at her, full in the face*]

Insolent Youth, your turn will come! . . .

[*She dies.*]

CURTAIN

NOTICE

The historical facts are widely different from those which I here present: Mme. de Montespan far from dying by poison, survived twenty-seven years the scene of August 1680 with the King. It was on the contrary Mlle. de Fontanges who died in 1681 in mysterious and sudden fashion where it was thought to recognize the criminal hand of her rival. Mlle. de Blois was but three years old in 1680; and if Louvois did in truth defend Madame de Montespan against La Reynie, it was Colbert who had affianced his younger daughter to the favorite's nephew.

These are rather grave liberties to take with history. I wish to point them out not in order to excuse myself, but to show doubtless, that I am inexcusable. I will not go so far as to imitate the charming carelessness of a Schiller, who took a certain pride in affirming his independence in the face of history, and in the preface to his "Fiesco" boasts of having retained merely the name and mask of the historical character. I

have been most careful on the contrary to hold as faithfully as possible, to the true characteristics of Mme. de Montespan, the King, Louvois and La Reynie; but I have not thought it necessary to restrict myself to absolute accuracy when this was not demanded by the interior logic of the characters; at such points where I saw in the traits of my model the outline of a passion or an action which stops en route, I have even deliberately set out to develop it. This is then no attempt to write a chapter of history. I have merely tried, first to paint the soul of an ambitious woman who feels with the advent of age her power slipping from her, and then to portray the savage explosion which can suddenly burst forth in the heart of one of the most reasonable and self-controlled forms of society that has ever existed. In order to feel quite free I at first called this drama "Ambition" and the principal heroine "Victoria Fieschi." But it seemed franker to give the characters their true names and thus affirm the rights of art versus history.

There are two orders of historic fact: those having a profoundly human significance summing up the essence of a nation or a great soul which is registered in the hearts of the people, and on the

other hand, those accidental and transient facts similar to the variations and embellishments executed upon the principal theme. These I believe one can use quite freely provided one does not touch the theme; these I believe one *should* use freely if thereby one is able to confer to the theme its just value. It suffices to remain true to the rhythm of the characters and the general tone of the times.

But the question of history in the theatre is too important for me to think of dealing with it in so slight a work. I will try to do so elsewhere. Be it enough to say that history is not a book where everything must be written down to the very last word and of which art must servilely spell each syllable. It is a granary of immense forces, Aeolus's bag inflated with the passions of all humanity. Let art unchain them if it can. Everything that adds to life and multiplies its energies is good. Let us nourish ourselves with the passions of the centuries. Truth is life.

R. R.

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